Application to register land at Huntington Road, Coxheath as a new Village Green

A report by the Director of Environment and Waste to Kent County Council's Regulation Committee Member Panel on Monday 11th February 2008.

Recommendation: I recommend that the County Council informs the applicant that the application to register the land at Huntington Road, Coxheath has been accepted, and that the land subject to the application be formally registered as a Village Green.

Introduction

 The County Council has received an application to register land at Huntington Road, Coxheath as a new Village Green from local resident Ms. K. Hodgkiss ("the applicant"). The application, dated 29th March 2006, was allocated the application number 590. A plan of the site is shown on Appendix A to this report and a copy of the application form is attached at Appendix B.

Procedure

- 2. This application has been made under section 13 of the Commons Registration Act 1965 and regulation 3 of the Common Registration (New Land) Regulations 1969. These regulations came into force on the 3rd January 1970, and regulation 3 enables the making of an application where, in accordance with section 22 of the 1965 Act, after the 2nd January 1970 any land becomes a Town or Village Green.
- 3. Although the Commons Registration Act 1965 has now been replaced by the Commons Act 2006, because this application was received prior to the coming into effect of the new 2006 Act, it must be dealt with under the former legislation.
- 4. For the purpose of this application, therefore, section 22 of the 1965 Act (as amended by section 98 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) applies. It defines a Village Green as:

'land on which for not less that twenty years a significant number of the inhabitants of any locality, or of any neighbourhood within a locality, have indulged in lawful sports and pastimes as of right, and either:

- (a) continue to do so, or
- (b) have ceased to do so for not more than such period as may be prescribed, or determined in accordance with prescribed provisions'.
- 5. As a standard procedure set out in the regulations, the County Council must notify the owners of the land, every local authority and any other known interested persons. It must also publicise the application in the press and put up a site notice. The publicity must state a period of at least six weeks during which objections and representations can be made.

The Case

- 6. The area of land subject to this application ("the application site") consists of a rectangular area of grassed open space situated within a residential housing estate. It is surrounded on three sides by Huntington Road and on the fourth side by a tarmaced path which serves property numbers 11 to 27 (odd numbers only) Huntington Road. However, the electricity sub-station located on the north-eastern corner of the site does not form part from the application and would have to be excluded from any potential registration of the land as a Village Green.
- 7. The application has been made on the grounds that the application site has become a village green by virtue of the actual use of the land by the local inhabitants for lawful sports and pastimes 'as of right' for more than 20 years.
- 8. Included in the application were 11 user evidence questionnaires from local residents asserting that the application site has been available for free and uninhibited use by local residents for lawful sports and pastimes over the last twenty years and beyond. Also included as part of the application was a copy of a recent planning application concerning the land as well as photographs showing use of the application site. A further 15 statements of use were also submitted by the applicant during the course of the investigation process.

Consultations

9. Consultations have been carried out as required and no objections to the proposal have been received. As a result of the consultation, 13 letters of support were received from local residents describing their knowledge of the application site and further adding to the evidence of use which was submitted with the original application. The Coxheath Parish Council also wrote to express its strong support for the application on the grounds that the land in question has been used by local residents for many years.

Landowner

- 10. The application site is owned by the Maidstone Housing Trust, which has been contacted as part of the consultation process. In February 2006 (prior to the Village Green application being submitted), the Trust applied for planning permission for the erection of 6 terraced houses with a new access road. However, this application was refused by Maidstone Borough Council in April 2006 on the grounds that the proposal would be detrimental to the character of the area, that it would result in the loss of an important green space used for recreation and that the design of the properties was not appropriate for the area.
- 11.A copy of the application and relevant documentation has been sent to the Maidstone Housing Trust and, after careful consideration, the Trust has confirmed that it has decided not to oppose the application.

Legal tests

12. In dealing with an application to register a new Village Green the County Council must consider the following criteria:

- (a) Whether use of the land has been 'as of right'?
- (b) Whether use of the land has been for the purposes of lawful sports and pastimes?
- (c) Whether use has been by a significant number of inhabitants of a particular locality, neighbourhood or a neighbourhood within a locality?
- (d) Whether use has taken place over period of twenty years or more?
- (e) Whether use of the land by the inhabitants is continuing up until the date of registration?

I shall now take each of these points and elaborate on them individually:

(a) Whether use of the land has been 'as of right'?

- 13. The definition of the phrase 'as of right' has been considered in recent High Court case law. Following the judgement in the *Sunningwell¹ case*, it is now considered that if a person uses the land for a required period of time without force, secrecy or permission (*nec vi, nec clam, nec precario*), and the landowner does not stop him or advertise the fact that he has no right to be there, then rights are acquired and further use becomes 'as of right'.
- 14. In this case, there is no evidence of any of the witnesses ever having been verbally challenged or physically prevented from gaining access to the land. Nor is there any suggestion that the use of the land has been secretive or could have gone unnoticed. From the user evidence submitted, the land appears to have been in regular usage since the housing estate was first built in the 1950s; indeed, the fact that the land in question serves as a focal point for the surrounding houses makes it an obvious place for local residents to congregate and recreate.
- 15. In the absence of any information to the contrary from the landowner, I am satisfied that the use of the land has not been with force, with secrecy or with permission during the requisite 20 year period (1986 to 2006).

(b) Whether use of the land has been for the purposes of lawful sports and pastimes?

- 16. Lawful sports and pastimes can be commonplace activities including dog walking, children playing, picnicking and kite-flying. Legal principle does not require that rights of this nature be limited to certain ancient pastimes (such as maypole dancing) or for organised sports or communal activities to have taken place; solitary and informal kinds of recreation are equally as valid.
- 17. In this case, the evidence demonstrates that a wide range of recreational activities have taken place on the land (such as picnics, dog-walking and ball-games). Included at Appendix C is a table summarising evidence of use by local residents which shows the full range of activities claimed to have taken place.
- 18. In addition to the large number of adults who have used the land, a number of statements of use have been received from children (under the age of 18) who have used the land as a meeting place to socialise with friends, play games or

¹ R v. Oxfordshire County Council, ex p. Sunningwell Parish Council (2001)

engage in sporting activities. This evidence supports the general use of the land as a Village Green by the whole community.

(c) Whether use has been by a significant number of inhabitants of a particular locality, neighbourhood or a neighbourhood within a locality?

- 19. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 inserted a new section dealing with locality into section 22 of the 1965 Act. It should now be shown that the use made of the land has been and continues to be inhabitants of any locality, or of a neighbourhood within a locality. The use need not be exclusively by local inhabitants, but they should be the significant number.
- 20. In this case, the applicant has helpfully provided a plan showing the area within which users of the land reside (attached at Appendix D) and, at Part 3 the application form, has defined the locality as 'Huntington Road, Coxheath'.
- 21. The definition of locality for the purposes of a village green application has been the subject of much debate in the courts and there is still no definite rule to be applied. In the Cheltenham Builders² case, considered that *…at the very least, Parliament required the users of the land to be the inhabitants of somewhere that could sensibly be described as a locality… there has to be, in my judgement, a sufficiently cohesive entity which is capable of definition'. He later went on to indicate that this could mean that the locality should constitute <i>'some legally recognised administrative division of the county'*.
- 22. In this case, I consider that Huntington Road is too narrow a definition to accurately reflect the threshold of use. Indeed, if the entirety of the users of the land only resided in Huntington Road, then this may be insufficient to constitute a locality in the sense in which Parliament intended it to apply. However, in this case, although use is generally from those whose homes are situated immediately opposite the land, there is evidence from people living in surrounding roads. There is also evidence to suggest that the land is used (albeit perhaps occasionally) by those living in the wider Coxheath area. I therefore consider that the correct locality is the administrative parish of Coxheath.
- 23. In terms of the 'significant number' issue, this was considered in the *McAlpine Homes*³ case, in which it was held that significant did not necessarily mean considerable or substantial: Sullivan J stated that what matters is that the number of users has to be sufficient to indicate that "*their use of the land signifies that it is in general use by the local community for informal recreation, rather that occasional use by individuals as trespassers*".
- 24. It is clear from the summary provided at Appendix C that use of the land has not been insignificant. Although some of the users have not stated their frequency of use, it is clear from the accounts provided by others that the land has been in general use by local on a regular basis. This is supported by the 11 user evidence forms and 15 statements of use and is further supplemented by the letters of support which indicate general use by the community for informal recreation: one letter described how 'on summer evenings, as many as 30 children would be

² R (Cheltenham Builders Ltd.) v South Gloucestershire District Council (2003)

³ R (Alfred McAlpine Homes Ltd.) v Staffordshire County Council (2002)

seen playing on the green [which] included many children from other parts of *Coxheath*', whilst another confirms that use has been observed 'on a daily basis'. I am therefore satisfied that use of the land in this case has been by a significant number of inhabitants of a particular locality.

(d) Whether use has taken place over period of twenty years or more?

- 25. The 'usergram' at Appendix E shows that there is evidence of use from the witness statements dating back as far as 1951 (when the housing estate was built). Twelve of the witnesses have used the land for at least 20 years, with another asserting nineteen years' use. A further 23 witnesses have also used the land during the requisite period but for a period of less than 20 years. It does not matter that some people have used the land for less than 20 years provided that the user evidence, when considered as a whole, shows general use over a 20 year period. This is clearly the case here, as illustrated by the usergram.
- 26. It is therefore evident that use has taken place for a full period of at least twenty years, with some witnesses attesting to use over a far longer period.

(e) Whether use of the land by the inhabitants is continuing up until the date of application?

- 27. The recent amendment made by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 required that use of the claimed green continues up until the date of registration 'as of right'. However, partly in response to the large number of village green applications which were being defeated simply because landowners were erecting fences or notices at the last minute prior to the determination of applications affecting their land, this requirement was overturned by the House of Lords in the *Oxfordshire*⁴ case. It is now held that use need only take place up until the date of application and not necessarily continue to the date of registration.
- 28. In this case, the open nature of the site means that people need only step onto the application site from a public highway without meeting any barriers or obstructions. The only way in which access could be prevented is to fence the site in its entirety: no mention is made of this ever having happened by any of the witnesses and there is no evidence of the remains of any fencing visible on the site itself. I am therefore satisfied that use of the land by the local inhabitants did continue up until (and beyond) the date of application.

Conclusion

29. From close consideration of the evidence submitted, I have concluded that all the legal tests concerning the registration of the land as a Village Green (as set out above) have been met.

⁴ Oxfordshire County Council v Oxford City Council and Catherine Mary Robinson (2006)

Recommendations

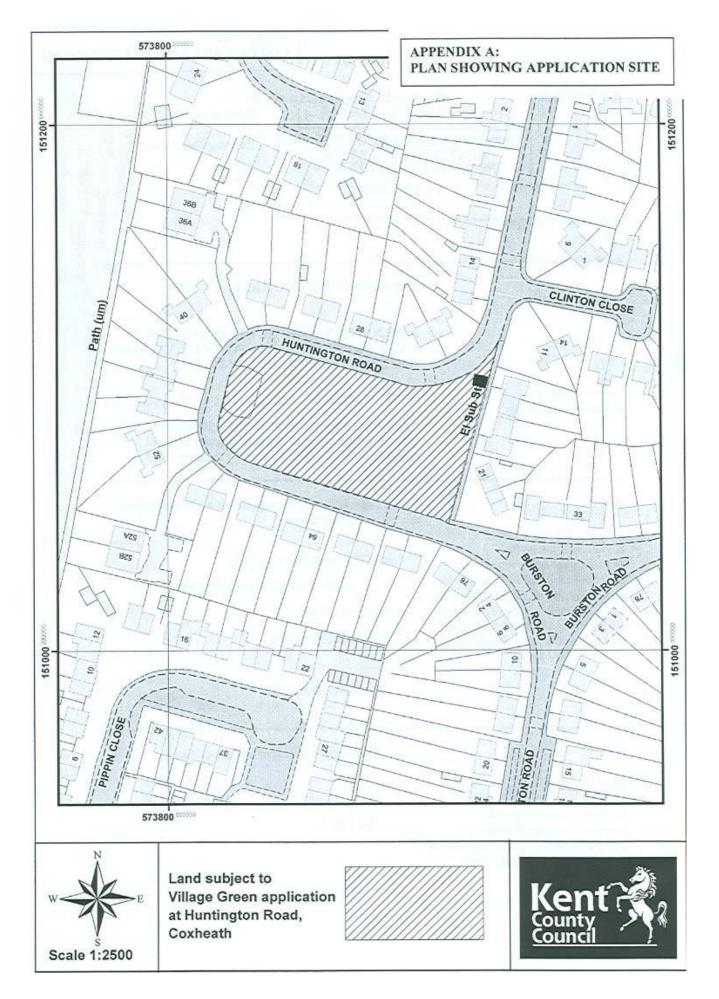
30. I recommend that the County Council informs the applicant that the application to register the land at Huntington Road, Coxheath has been accepted, and that the land subject to the application be formally registered as a Village Green.

Accountable Officer: Dr. Linda Davies – Tel: 01622 221500 or Email: linda.davies@kent.gov.uk Case Officer: Miss. Melanie McNeir – Tel: 01622 221511 or Email: melanie.mcneir@kent.gov.uk

The main file is available for viewing on request at the Environment and Waste Division, Environment and Regeneration Directorate, Invicta House, County Hall, Maidstone. Please contact the case officer for further details.

Background documents

APPENDIX A – Plan showing application site APPENDIX B – Copy of application form APPENDIX C – Table summarising user evidence APPENDIX D – Map showing the locality APPENDIX E – 'Usergram' showing period of use



	ial stamp of registration author ating date of receipt	Application No. 590						
KENT CO REGISTRA	APR 2006	Register Unit No(s) VG VG						
SECTION 13	COMMONS REGISTRA	TION ACT 1965						
¹ insert name of registration authority	GREEN AFTER 2 ND JAN	E A TOWN OR VILLAGE WARY 1970 WOTH COUNCIL for the registration as a land described below,						
Part 1	Name and address of the a one) of every applicant	applicant or (if more than						
(Give Christian names or forenames and surname or, in the case of a body corporate or unincorporate, the full title of the body. If part 2 is not completed all correspondence and notices will be sent to the first named applicant).	KATE HODGKISS 72 HUNTINGTON ROAD COXHEATH MAIDSTONE							

Part 2

Name and address of solicitor, if any.

(This part should be completed only if a solicitor has been instructed for the purposes of the application. If it is completed, all correspondence and notices will be sent to the solicitor)

4:8

N/A.

MEIJ 404

Part 3	Particulars of the land to be registered, i.e. the land claimed to have become a town or village green								
	Name by which usually known THE GREEN								
	Locality HUNTINGTON ROAD, COXHEAT MAIDSTONE, KENT MEIT Colour on plan herewith HATCHED BLUE								
Part 4	On what date did the land become a town or village green?								
	15 MARCH 2006.								
Part 5	How did the land become a town or village green?								
BY THE A	CTUAL USE OF THE LAND TO BE REGISTED								
	OCAL INHABITANTS FOR LAWFUL SPOR								
	STIMES AS OF RIGHT FOR MORE THAN								
TWENTY									
Part 6	Name and address of every person whom the applicant believes to be an owner, leasee, tenant or occupier of any part of the land claimed to have become a town or village green (if none are known, write 'none')								
MAIDSTC	NE HOUSING TRUST LIMITED								
	N HOUSE, ST LEONARD'S ROAD								
	ON, MAIDSTONE, KENT MEILOLS								
Part 7	For applications to register substituted land (see Note 5); to be disregarded in other cases.								
	Particulars of the "taken land" i.e. the land which ceased to be a town or village green (or part thereof) when the land described in part 3 became a town or village green (or part)								
	Name by which usually known								
	Name by which usually known Locality								

Colour on plan herewith (if any)

If registered under the 1965 Act, register unit No(s)

Part 8

Part 9

List of supporting documents sent herewith, if any. (If none are sent, write "none")

- · EVIDENCE QUESTIONNAIRES + SIGNED MAP A
- · PHOTOGRAPHS
- · SUPPORTING LETTERS NOTES
- · PLAN B

If there are any other facts relating to the application which ought to be brought to the attention of the registration authority (in particular if any person interested in the land is believed to dispute the claim that it has become a town or village green) full particulars should be given here. (Continue on the back if necessary)

- AN APPLICATION FOR PLANNING PERMISSION HAS BEEN MADE BY MAIDSTONE HOUSING TRUST TO DEVELOP PART OF THE LAND TO BE REGISTERED A COPY OF PLANNING APPLICATION NUMBER MA/06/03125 IS ENCLOSED.
 - · PLEASE SEE ENCLOSED COVERING LETTER .

²If the application must be signed

Date

by or on behalf of each individual applicant, and by the secretary or some Signatures

.....

other duly authorised officer of any applicant which is a body corporate

or unincorporate

(See Note 9)

¹Insert full name (and address if not given in the application form) ²Delete and adapt as necessary ³Insert name if applicable

⁴Insert "marking" as on plan

⁵Delete this paragraph if there is no plan referred to in Part 7 STATUTORY DECLARATION IN SUPPORT

To be made by the applicant, or by one of the applicants, or by his or their solicitor, or, if the applicant is a body corporate or unincorporate, by its solicitor or by the person who signed the application.

I, KATE HODGKISS solemnly and sincerely declare as follows:-

1.² I am [(the person (one of the persons) who (has) (have) signed the foregoing application) (the solicitor to (the applicant) (²one of the applicants)]

2. I have read the Notes to the application form.

3. The facts set out in the application form are to the best of my knowledge and belief fully and truly stated and I am not aware of any other fact which should be brought to the attention of the registration authority as likely to affect its decision on this application, not of any document relating to the matter other than those (if any) mentioned in parts 8 and 9 of the application.

4. The plan now produced and shown to me marked⁴ PLAN is the plan referred to in Part 3 of the application.

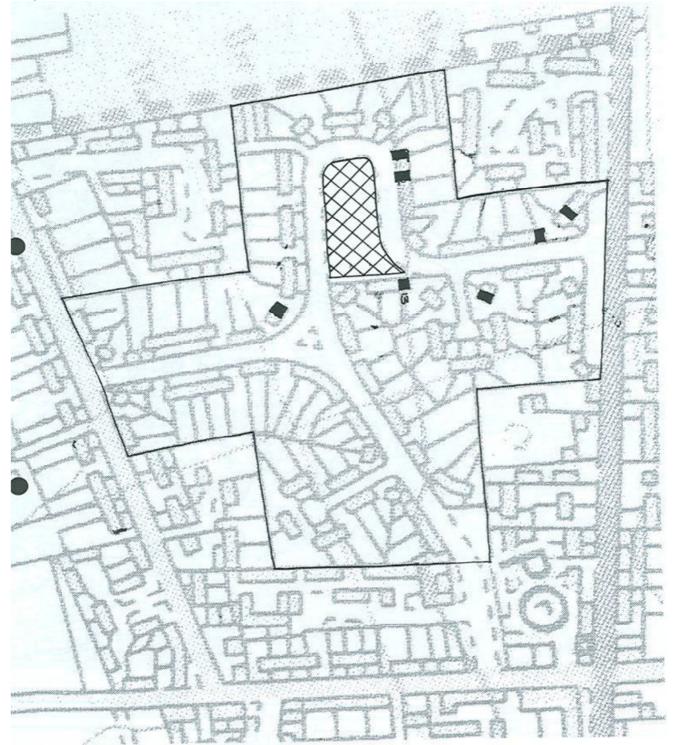
5.5 The plan now produced and shown to me marked⁴______is the plan referred to in Part 7 of the application.

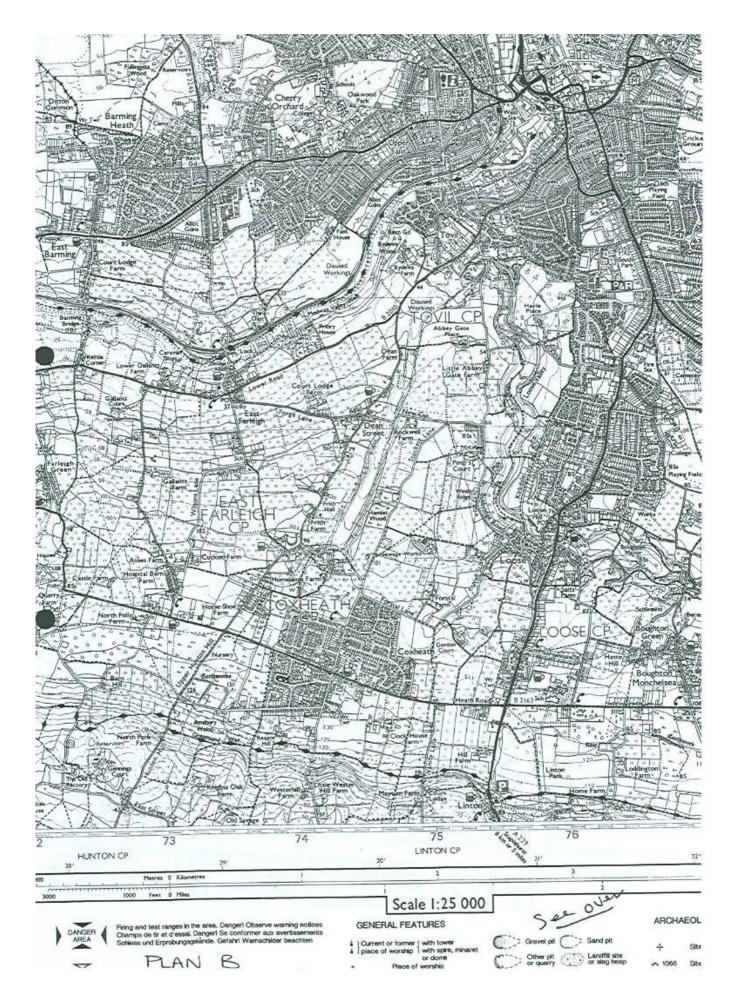
And I make this solemn declaration, conscientiously believing the same to be true, and by virtue of the Statutory Declarations Act 1835.

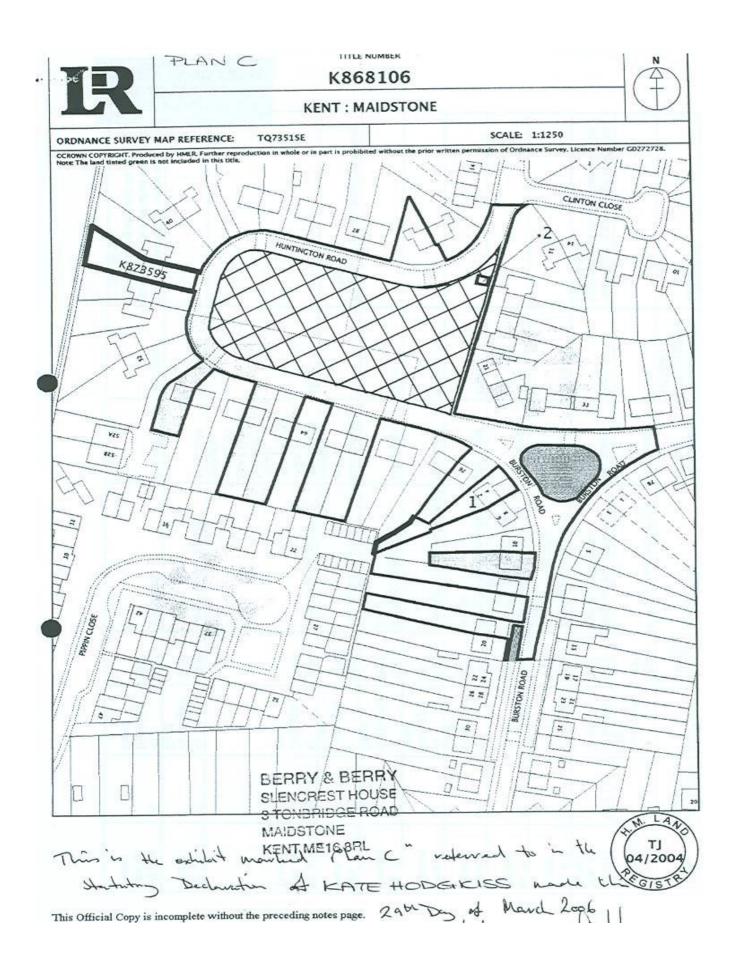


Declared by the said ... KATE ... HODSKISS) The HUNDTINGTOD RD., COXHENTH MAIDETONE, KONT MEITADH at ... SLENCLEST. HOUSE +.3. TONGLIDGE L ROAD, MAIDETONE +.3. TONGLIDGE L Signature of Declarant Before me Signature ANTHADEN Address SLEUCREST HOUSE STONERID MADSTONE KENT ME 16 BPH SLENC Ar. 3 TOUBLIDGE RD Ò Qualification Servertes REMINDER TO OFFICER TAKING DECLARATION: Please initial all alterations and mark any plan as an exhibit.

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Append				5				2215	002112		1992
COMMENTS		Has observed wide range of activities taking place. Land is widely used by local children.			A V DE		XTIT	Silver jubilee celebrations took place on the land			Have observed use of the land on a daily basis. Own children played on the land along with approx. 30 foster children
CHALLENGES/ DETERRENTS TO USE?	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	222	None	None	Not stated
FREQUENCY OF USE	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Mainly during school holidays	Weekly with children, more often during school holidays. Now use it twice weekly for walking	Not stated	Not stated
ACTIVITIES	Football, rounders, cricket	Dog-walking, children's games, walking etc.	Dog-walking, childrens games, recreational purposes	Ball games, meeting friends, general recreation and relaxation	Football, cricket and other sports	Bike-riding, football, walking	Walking, cycle-riding, football	Playing with children	Walking for exercise	Mainly to play football	Not stated
PERIOD OF USE	2001 - 2007	1974 - 2007	1974 - 2007	1987 - 2006	2003 - 2007	1992 – 2007	1992 – 2007	1958 – 1964	1971 - 2006	2000 - 2006	1977 - 2007
ADDRESS	12 Huntington Road	13 Burston Road	13 Burston Road	13 Clinton Close	19 Huntington Road	26 Huntington Road	26 Huntington Road	6 Culpepper Road	10 Culpepper Road	84 Huntington Road	44 Huntington Road
TYPE OF EVIDENCE	ST	ST + LS	ST	ST	ST	ST	ST	UEF	UEF + LS	ST	SI
NAME	Mrs. K. Brook-child	Mr. and Mrs. J. Collins	Mr. N. Collins	Mr. T. Collins	Ms. C. Denton	Miss. J. Duncan	Mr. P. Duncan	Mrs. J. Dunk	Mr. and Mrs. W. Dunn	MrC. Falcus	Mr. and Mrs. G. Foster

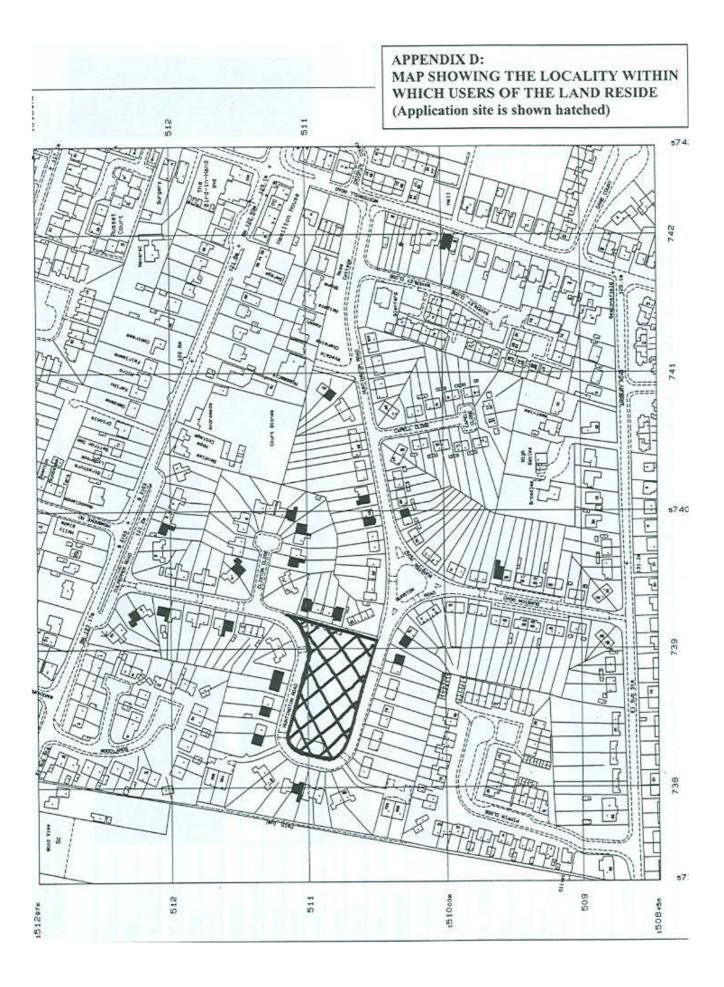
Appendix C: Table summarising user evidence

ays None Own children used land for football in the winter and cricket in the summer. On summer evening shave observed as many as 30 children playing on the green, incl. those form other parts of Coxheath. Grandchildren and great- grandchildren have used the land.	None	None Silver jubilee celebrations took place on the land	ted None	ted None	ted None	ntly None	ted None	ted None	ted Not stated The land is an important and valued amenity in our local area and is in almost constant use, especially during summer months.	None	ays None Celebrations took place on the silver jubilee and for the wedding Charles and Diana
Most days	Not stated	Daily	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Constantly	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Most days
Playing with children, exercising dogs	Athletics, football	Games, dog-walking, tennis (summer only)	Dog-training, ball games with children	Walking, playing Frisbee, dog-walking	Walking, football, bike- riding, meeting friends	walking	'lawful sports and pastimes'	'lawful sports and pastimes'	Recreation, playing with children	Exercising dogs, meeting friends, football, general recreation	Street parties, picking dandelions (for wine making), playing with
2006	1985 - 2000	1965 - 1973, then 1998 - 2006	1998 - 2007	2005 - 2007	2007	1951 - 2006	2000 - 2006	2000 - 2006	1989 - 2007	1998 - 2007	1953 - 1991
45 Huntington Road	45 Huntington Road	32 Huntington Road	28 Huntington Road	72 Huntington Road	9 Clinton Close	gton	nton	10 Clinton Close	41 Huntington Road	28 Huntington Road	Former resident of Huntington
SI	ST	UEF	ST	ST	ST	UEF	ST	ST	rs	ST	UEF
Mr. K. Fox	Mr. P. Fox	Mr. and Mrs. Genn	Ms. H. Hickes	Ms. K. Hodgkiss	Miss. H. Jopson	Mrs. G. Landa	Mr. A. Letherby	Ms. S. Letherby	Mr. and Mrs. D. Mann	Mr. P. McMaster	Ms. J. Pronger

		n the e and	QEII	nse	
		Has 10 grandchildren who play on the green. Coronation party took place there in 1953 as well as Charles and Diana wedding party	Green was used for village celebrations of the Coronation of QEII in 1953 and the jubilee	Currently the local postman for Huntington Road – has observed use by children playing	
None	None	None	None	Not stated	None
5 - 6 times, more in the summer	Every day when younger, now only occasionally	Every day	2 -3 times per week in Winter, more during the summer	Not stated	Every day
walking	Games, dog-walking	Games, general recreation, dog-walking, various parties	Playing informal games (e.g. cricket, rounders), picnics, parties, walking, exercising, dog-walking, playing with children	Playing as a child	Football, cricket, tennis and aames, exercising dog
1951 - 2006	1976 – 2006	1950 – 2006	1951 - 2006	1974 - 2007	1951 - 2006
74 Huntington Road	Sunnyside, Old Loose Hill, Loose	2 Huntington Road	74 Huntington Road	26 Westerhill Road	1, Clinton Close
UEF	DEF OF	ner	UEF	FS	UEF
Mrs. E. Roberts	Mr and Mrs. A. Towner	Mr. and Mrs. F. Towner	Mrs. K. Tuffin	Mr. R. Webb	Mr. G. Woollett

ST = Statement of use LS = Letter of support (received during the consultation process)

In addition to the above, a further 13 statements were received from children (under the age of 18) asserting their use of the land over recent vears for activities such as football, cricket, dodgeball, rounders, cycling, socialising, picnics etc.



Uates	2001 - 2007	1974 - 2007	1974 - 2007	1987 - 2006	2003-2007	1992 - 2007	1992 - 2007	1958 - 1964	1971 - 2006	2000 - 2006	1961 - 2006	1985 - 2000	1998 - 2006	1998 - 2007	2005 - 2007	2007 only	1951 - 2006	2000-2006	2000 - 2006	1989 - 2007	1998 - 2007	1953 - 1991	1951 - 2006	1976 - 2006	1950 - 2006	1951 - 2006	1951-2006
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Notes: The date of application is 2006 and thus the twenty year 'material period' is 1986 - 2006. Use by witnesses is stated to be up until 2006 (the date their evidence forms were signed) or 2007 (the date their statements were signed). However, it is acknowledged that it most cases they may well still be using the application site for lawful sports and pastimes.

APPENDIX E: USERGRAM SHOWING PERIOD